

# LIFTING THE BONNET ON THE BARRIERS TO DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

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# TRADESWOMEN AUSTRALIA FOUNDATION

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## **ABOUT TRADESWOMEN AUSTRALIA**

Tradeswomen Australia is a not for profit organisation dedicated to gender equality and empowerment for all girls and women to access, participate and succeed in trades. We value workplace diversity and work with businesses to achieve strategic and operational goals supporting the engagement, retention and recruitment of women in trades.

## **TRADESWOMEN AUSTRALIA**

Our services can increase employee engagement, improve performance, innovate, retain talent, improve employee wellbeing, remove unlawful behaviour such as harassment and discrimination.

To collect data for this paper Tradeswomen Australia launched an online survey targetting automotive workers and employers. Only 56% of the survey respondents agreed with the following statement “My workplace has leadership that supports diversity and inclusion”.



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This white paper was developed from consultation with automotive workers during focus groups and an online survey. It highlights the key barriers facing the Victorian automotive sector regarding the implementation of workplace diversity, links to work-related factors (that impact mental health) and the psychological safety of employees.

Tradeswomen Australia is leading the development and implementation of a Workplace Diversity Project with the support of Worksafe's WorkWell Mental Health Improvement Fund and industry partners. The purpose of the project is to provide direction in the advancement of a prevention-oriented long-term change strategy focused on increasing psychological safety through diversity within the automotive industry. Over the past 20 years, the engagement of diverse groups within the automotive industry within Australia has been disproportionately lower than other industries. As outlined in this report, current perceptions across a range of stakeholders, the lack of understanding of work-related factors and a deeply embedded culture are all critical barriers preventing diversity and inclusion in the workplace.



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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## **Employer & Industry Contributors:**

Box Hill Institute | Chisholm Institute | Concern Australia | Cummins South Pacific | GForce Employment Solutions | Goulburn Ovens Institute of TAFE | Holmesglen Institute | Kangan Institute | MEGT Australia | MTAA Super | The National Collision Repairer | Porsche Cars Australia | Repco Authorised Service | Ringwood Training | TAFE Gippsland | Toyota Australia | Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce - VACC | WPC Group

## **Focus groups attendees:**

The focus groups were attended by people engaged in Victorian automotive industries either directly or indirectly. The feedback, opinions and information was provided by individuals who willingly contributed to this research with a goal of improving the engagement of diverse groups, employee mental health and workplace culture.

## **Survey Participants:**

The feedback, opinions and information provided through the survey were collated anonymously from individuals who willingly contributed to this research to improve the engagement of diverse groups, employee mental health and workplace cultures.

Thank you to the individuals who shared these observations, experiences, and stories.

## **Data Collection:**

Data on workplace mental health, inclusion, diversity and culture was collated through a online survey and focus groups. Throughout the research and discovery phase, 61 people engaged across three focus groups (67% female) and 57 people participated in the online survey. The data and feedback were conducted through online platforms and included organisations involved in the automotive industry. The focus groups and survey were structured with a series of conversation topics canvassing workplace mental health, workplace diversity and inclusion. Quotations and data from those who participated in the research have been incorporated in this report.

# INDUSTRY AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

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**‘Diversity in the workplace means that a company hires a wide range of diverse individuals. Diversity is often misconceived as solely multicultural matters; however it also applies (but not limited) to diversity of gender, race, ethnicity, age, sexuality, language, education, disability and other attributes’.**

Article: What is diversity in the workplace? 2019 Author: Give A Grad A Go

In the past year, the Diversity Council of Australia studied the cultural origins of Australia's business leaders. They did so with particular attention to leaders from an Asian cultural background. They found that compared to the 10% or so of the Australian community with an Asian background, only 1.9% of executive managers and 4% of directors have Asian cultural origins.

Organisations that have clear goals to create a diverse and inclusive workplace report significantly better experiences with team inclusion than those without.

In Australia, according to 2018 workforce data from the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA), 77% of the automotive workforce is male. Only 3.3% of automotive technicians are female. Very few women are represented in front-line sales roles. One Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) reports that only 10% of its network's sales consultants are women. Few women hold the top job in leadership positions in Australia, with only 5% of CEOs being women. These statistics have shown barely any change over the past five years.

## **The link between Diversity, Inclusion and Mental Health**

If we were to think through why embracing or being explicit about celebrating diversity and inclusivity matters, it may be framed in the following terms: it is about creating a positive workplace culture, it is about encouraging productivity, and it is about creating a safe and mentally healthy workplace.

Given the breadth of issues associated with diversity and inclusion, gender, race, ethnicity, age, sexuality, language, education, disability and other attributes there remains a surprisingly narrow focus in terms of activity that organisations are employing in their policies and programs.

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# UNDERSTANDING WORK RELATED FACTORS

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Work-related factors are anything in the design or management of work that can impact an employee's mental health or Inclusion. If these are not managed, there is an increased risk of work-related stress, which may lead to physical injury, mental injury or even both.

Work-related stress describes an employee's stress response to work-related factors. These responses may be physical, mental, emotional or behavioural.

Under the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 (OHS Act), employers must provide and maintain a working environment for their employees, including independent contractors, that is safe and without risks to health[1].

Common work-related factors are:

- low job control
- high and low job demands
- poor support
- poor organisational change management
- poor organisational justice
- low recognition and reward
- low role clarity
- poor workplace relationships
- poor environmental conditions
- remote and isolated work
- violent or traumatic events

When reviewing work-related factors it is important to be mindful of how they interlink with workplace diversity. A diverse and inclusive workforce requires strong communication, support for change, successful change management and positive workplace relationships.

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[1] Worksafe Victoria: Occupational health and safety – your legal duties. An overview of employer and employee responsibilities under the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004.

# UNDERSTANDING DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

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While each workplace will require different considerations in terms of policy and design, it is important to recognise that automotive workplaces are not homogenous and policy, procedures and facilities must ultimately be designed to be responsive to the different needs of employees.

This includes acknowledging that responding to an employee's needs requires an understanding of a broad range of personal differences, including religion, ethnicity, gender, sex, sexual orientation, age, culture, language and communication requirements or disability. It also involves acknowledging contextual differences such as socioeconomic status, and geographic location.

Understanding employee differences will allow automotive workplaces to develop workplace solutions and cultures that reflect the individual needs of all employees. An inclusive culture where employees feel respected, supported and appreciated will remove barriers to diversity and reduce the risk of work-related stress, which may lead to physical injury, mental injury or even both.



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# THE IMPACT OF IMPLICIT BIAS IN WORKPLACE DIVERSITY

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A key driver of the barriers employers face regarding positive mental health, diversity and workplace culture is the impact of implicit bias on decision making, language and behaviours.

Implicit bias is the stereotypes our brains take to make sense of the world. As our brain receives information it makes quick judgments, this feeds into stereotypes. When faced with a situation that is not the stereotype we are challenged, our brain reacts by coming up with all the reasons why logical course of action would not be the right fit.

Data from the Harvard's Implicit Association Test reveals the unconscious bias of individuals preferences

- 64% prefer Straight over Gay People
- 68% prefer White over Black People
- 75% prefer Thin over Fat People
- 78% prefer Able-bodied over Disabled People

Statistics from Harvard's Implicit Association Test (Project Implicit, 2017).

Automotive workplace's need to be mindful of bias and stereotyping when recruiting, promoting, allocating work and managing performance.

"Bias and stereotypes in the workplace can mean:

- Talented people are left out of your workforce or not allowed equal opportunity for development and career progression
- Diverse voices aren't heard in meetings and decisions can be impaired
- Your culture is not genuinely demonstrating inclusive workplace principles
- Employees are not able to fully contribute to your organisation
- Creativity and productivity of your team or organisation may be compromised." (Queensland Government, Bias webpage)



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# INDUSTRY INSIGHTS

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Data from both the focus groups and survey show consistent themes linked to work-related factors are impacting the mental health and wellbeing of current employees and impeding the employment of diverse groups.

## **Equitable recruitment practices**

***(Work-related factor: poor organisational justice)***

Within the automotive industry, bias plays a harmful role in many day-to-day business processes such as recruitment and promotion. In the hiring process, unconscious bias happens when a recruiter forms an opinion about candidates based solely on first impressions or perceived notions of strength, ability and impacts on employee retention. Modifying the recruitment process to mitigate against bias or unfair judgment and strategic advertising of available positions is key to diversification of the workforce (2).

***"Men apply for a job when they meet only 60% of the qualifications, but women apply only if they meet 100%" Focus Group Participant***

***"I have found the number one reason employers don't want to employ women is because of assumptions and fears of women reporting assault" Focus Group Participant***

***"When I have spoken to some workshop owners about employing women, they tell me all the reasons why it won't work" Focus Group Participant***

***"We need to focus on language, men will say things like It is good you are giving it a go, and it comes across as patronising" Focus Group Participant***

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**Conflict between work and family commitments**  
***(Work-related factor: low job control, poor support)***

Employees should not feel guilty for taking a child or aging parent to the doctor, yet for many people, these events are stress-producing because they feel they are always letting down either their family or their employer.

The impact of caring roles was also raised during the recruitment process when employers noted concerns about the impact this would have on workplace productivity, particularly for women, when employing new candidates.

***In the “One of the Boys” report more than half (51%) agreed that part-time (flexible) working arrangements may come at the expense of career opportunities in their workplace.***

***“Flexible work arrangements by employers across the industry will encourage the retention of women with care responsibilities in automotive trades jobs.” Focus Group Participant***

**Workplace Bullying & Harassment**  
***(Work-related factors: violent or traumatic events and poor workplace relationships)***

Relationships with managers and peers can positively or negatively affect the way a worker feels, and it is likely that wherever groups of people work together, some conflict will arise from time to time.

This is normal and, in some cases, can provide momentum for innovation and growth. Conflict becomes a risk factor, however, where it remains unresolved. This may include prolonged friction between colleagues, harassment, or bullying.

Employers have a duty under the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 (OHS Act) to provide and maintain for employees, so far as is reasonably practicable, a working environment that is safe and without risk to health.

Employers can support safe work environments by maintaining a positive workforce culture. "Culture is a significant factor in preventing workplace bullying. Culture sets the standards and behaviours in a workplace. Everyone in the workplace contributes to workplace culture, however management has a greater influence and responsibility for establishing a positive culture at their workplace." WorkSafe Victoria website

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**Poor workplace relationships**

Poor workplace relationships, unresolved conflict or strained relationships between co-workers or with managers lead to mental ill-health.

Incivility is one of the biggest causes of problems in workplace relationships. Incivility is inappropriate behaviour such as rudeness, sarcasm and belittling or excluding people. This can be spoken or written.

Problems in workplace relationships can mean:

- workplace bullying, aggression, harassment including sexual harassment, discrimination, or other unreasonable behaviour by co-workers, supervisors or clients
- poor relationships between employees and their managers, supervisors, co-workers and clients or others the employee has to interact with as part of their job
- conflict between employees and their managers, supervisors or co-workers. This can become worse if managers are reluctant to deal with inappropriate behaviour
- employees are not given clear guidelines about how they are expected to behave
- a workplace culture that encourages disrespectful behaviour and ideas.

(Source: Worksafe Victoria - How can we create a mentally healthy workplace?)

***“It has a lot to do with the employer, it is the way the employer engages with the person or staff and puts bullying to bed when it happens otherwise it just grows and grows” Focus Group Participant***

***“A female apprentice put up with sexual harassment because she thought I am in a male dominated industry, so this is what I have to put up with” Focus Group Participant***

***Only 56% of the online survey respondents agreed with the following statement “Racial, ethnic, and gender-based jokes are not tolerated in my workplace”***

**Limited engagement in mental health conversations**  
***(Work-related factors: poor workplace relationships and poor support)***

Employers felt this was a challenging area for them and many managers are uncomfortable talking about mental illness at work. Employers considered employees' mental health and wellbeing as vitally important but differed over their capability to recognise and respond; and their role in addressing workplace stigma and discrimination.

The relationship between management and employee will be positive or negative depending on how well members of the group, especially managers, carry out their roles. The manager must be a leader who provides overall direction and must inspire supervisors and employees to actively work to achieve the group's objectives.

Source: (Paper: Relationship Between Employee, Supervisor & Manager: William Adkins Reviewed by: Michelle Seidel, B.Sc., LL.B., MBA June 2019)

'There is clear evidence that stigma and discrimination can be a significant barrier for people with a lived experience of mental illness when seeking and maintaining work or progressing in the workplace'.

(Source: Queensland Mental Health Commission Workplace Stigma Accessed Oct 2020)



## STIGMA

The World Health Organisation (2001) defines stigma as “a mark of shame, disgrace or disapproval which results in an individual being rejected, discriminated against, and excluded from participating in a number of different areas of society.” Scrambler (1998) describes stigma as “...any attribute, trait, or disorder that marks an individual as being unacceptably different from the ‘normal’ people with whom he or she interacts, and elicits some form of community sanction.”

(Source: beyondblue Information Paper - Stigma and discrimination associated with depression and anxiety August 2015)

***During the collection of data for this white paper only 68% of the online survey respondents agreed with the following statement “My supervisor demonstrates a commitment to positive mental health” Focus Group Participant***

***“How you are treated in the workplace and if you are accepted in the workplace makes the biggest impact on if you are happy in the workplace” Focus Group Participant***

***“Supervisors are often good technicians or mechanics and they are not trained on mental health issues which is why it might be left as an unresolved issue; they may not recognise it” Focus Group Participant***

### **Lack of facilities for diverse employees**

#### ***(Work-related factor: poor environmental conditions)***

Although little research has been completed within Australia, the theme of equitable access to facilities for diverse groups is present across a range of reports, papers, and articles. Access to facilities including prayer rooms, toilets, change rooms and breastfeeding facilities is often not available in many automotive workplaces, particularly small businesses. Many workplaces were either forgetting, overlooking, or ignoring the needs of current or potential employees.

Not having access to basic facilities (toilet, changerooms) can not only impact the psychological but also the physical health of employees.

***“It is seen as a luxury for a female to have a toilet in the workshop” Focus Group Participant***



## **"THE BOYS CLUB"**

***(Work-related factors: poor work environment and poor workplace relationships)***

As many workplaces are implementing diversity and inclusion initiatives within automotive the imbedded gender norms in the workplace create barriers for women's engagement and retention. Women have described how the industry 'boys club' acted as a barrier to career progression, with long-tenured men filling critical positions at all levels (from leading hand up to senior management).

In the "One of the Boys" report completed by Sydney University "several women in the study were pessimistic about the pace of cultural change in the sector, with one stating that it "will take another generation" to "decrease the stigma for women in leadership or women knowledgeable of automotive technology"

***"The lack of acceptance, and the absence of equal treatment of women as the key problem for women in their occupation" – One of the boy's report***

***"The people in the workplace need to be educated, because they have been in a male dominated industry for so long. Some, would be incapable of supporting a female apprentice" Focus Group Participant***

***Only 56% of the online survey respondents agreed with the following statement "My workplace has leadership that supports diversity and inclusion" Focus Group Participant***



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# RECCOMENDATIONS FOR MOVING TOWARDS DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

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Engaging in a prevention focused approach to workplace diversity and inclusion will support the mitigation of a range of work-related factors impacting the mental health and wellbeing of all employees.

Education, mentoring and a review of workplace practices can be applied to drive diversity and inclusion to create a workplace culture where all employees will benefit.

## **Review of workplace practices (Understanding Work Related Factors)**

By using a continual improvement cycle, an employer can review and improve workplace practices including recruitment, retention, and management procedures to ensure diversity and inclusion is embedded and bias will not impact decision making, operations or business success.

## **Education about Bias (The Impact of Implicit Bias in Workplace Diversity)**

By building a workplace understanding of bias increases the understanding of stereotyping. By raising employers and employees understanding enables them to become aware of their attitudes and behaviours and that they also see in their peers, leading teams to have healthy conversations when they become aware of stereotyping taking place within the workplace and in decision making.

## **Mentoring (Limited Engagement in Mental Health Conversations)**

By engaging in skill building through mentoring of leaders within the business, an employer can increase and embed skills and knowledge within the operations to deliver sustainable change and business improvements.

**Preventing Bullying and Harassment (Poor Workplace Relationships)**

Employers have a duty under the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 (OHS Act) to provide a working environment that is safe and without risks to health. This includes implementing workplace policies and procedures to prevent bullying and harassment, and providing Information, training, and supervision to prevent the risk of workplace bullying and harassment.

As there is potential for the risk of bullying and harassment when people work together, employers should put in place prevention methods as there is evidence to show interventions after bullying has occurred are effective. A research paper titled 'Interventions for prevention of bullying in the workplace' released in 2017 by Patricia A Gillen, Marlene Sinclair, W George Kernohan, Cecily M Begley and Ans G Luyben found "Prevention of bullying requires a proactive approach and management tends to be reactive and problem-focused." Sample interventions mentioned in the report "relate specifically to training, such as assertiveness training, or educational interventions aimed at altering behaviour or perception. Interventions may operate at one or more of these levels. They may be targeted at individuals, in particular managers or supervisors, using a prevention perspective. They may focus on policy, procedures, and guidelines, or on locally designed and implemented education and training, which may be facilitated by occupational health departments."

**Developing a mentally healthy workplace**

A research review conducted by Black Dog Institute identified five steps that can help guide an evidence-based, staged approach to developing and implementing a workplace mental health strategy and creating a mentally healthy workplace.

The review outlines the following steps:

Step 1 Establish commitment and leadership support

Step 2 Situational Analysis

Step 3 Strategy

Step 4 Review

Step 5 Adjust (5)



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